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Latin Conversation

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Permit me, as a teacher of Latin Conversation, to say what I am not, before there is any attempt to show what I actually do. I am neither a teacher of Modern Latin Conversation, nor do I teach a technical vocabulary, valid perhaps in only a limited field of study.

My purpose is not merely to acquaint my pupils with classic culture; that can be attained through delightful translations by competent scholars. My ultimate aim is to teach the student to think in Latin in terms of the phraseology as found in the letters of Cicero and Pliny. I have chosen letter writing, because, even in spite of the polish published correspondence doubtless undergoes, yet I feel that I am closer to spontaneous thought and the language of the man on the street in the century before and after the beginning of the Christian era.

I aim, therefore, at a mental discipline; but it must avoid all unnaturalness. If, therefore, in my quest for spontaneous Latin thinking, I were to use, say, *Orationes contra Catilinam* as my basis, I should be put in a strait jacket. And I think Cicero's shade would rise in hearty approval.

Granted all this, however, it must be equally evident why, at least for my purposes, modern Latin conversation would be a waste of time. *Automobilium, aeroplanum, radiophonum*,—all well and good; but what particular aid would such things lend to analyze the frame of mind behind, say, a double dative? Mind, however, I am not criticizing. If I were, my cavil would be confined to perhaps a minor and by no means prevalent abuse such as Germanicizing Latin. When so harmless and so beneficial an article as a pair of eye-glasses becomes *instrumenta vitrea ad aciem oculorum adiuvandam apta*, I see why Horace preferred to remain *lippus* all his life.

Nor do I aim to teach anything but common Latin. Here at Duquesne, for instance, many of my pupils purpose to go on for the Church. I, however, have never felt that any injustice is done in avoiding the technical terminology of Catholic theology. And I cite this particular situation to stress a general principle. For if in this respect the teacher of Latin conversation permits himself to become the victim of such circumstances, Nature, our surest guide, is not being followed. How did we first learn the thought processes of our own language? Did we not first think in terms of 'ships and strings and sealing wax and cabbages and kings' long before we were ever initiated into the mysteries of physics, chemistry, and what have you? In other words, I attempt to apply common experience to the classics and to build up rugged vehicles of Latin thought, strong enough to support the most burdensome of technical

vocabulary, which it is the duty of the specialist to teach, not mine.

What would be thought of any English Grammar School system that would put in the lap of the youngsters in the kindergarten the Essays of Addison, and then bid the teacher put on her sweetest smile and say, 'Now children let us begin to learn English.' History records, in fact, but one instance of that sort of thing. I refer, of course, to Silas Wegg with the wooden leg, who taught Mr. Boffins how to decline and fall with the Roman Empire. I regret to say, that Dickens reports that the attempt was not crowned with success.

Pardon the digression, and what, even I freely grant you, is ugly facetiousness. But as to the question of the utility of Latin conversation, my opinion is this: if Mr. Addison is amusing in an English kindergarten, Julius Caesar's polished *Commentaries* in second-year Latin is tragically so. For, after all, imperfect though they be, those youngsters can at least think in terms of pots and pans in the same language as that distinguished essayist. When, on the other hand, many a graduate student of Latin would not know how to get himself in out of the cold through the medium of Latin thought unassisted by a *Thesaurus Verborum Latinorum*, perhaps it is more comfortable to say no more, but rather leave the wretched *plebs* to its midnight oil and dreams troubled by the prowlings of Vercingetorix. But what a pity! How delightful and refreshing first-year Latin could be made, if never another Latin grammar in English were published, and we came by the halcyon days when State Boards would approve the idea that the best way to learn any language is to think it, and the best way to think it, is to start with a will and speak it.

Mistakes? Of course you would make mistakes, plenty of them. But in two months' time you would be so proud of your success, you would be apt to think you knew much more than you did. And with your success the students, too, would advance merrily with something permanent in their heads and gratitude in their hearts to you. You are perfectly justified in contorting your features at my conceit, when I say that I believe I have always gotten on well with pupils; but concede that much to my folly—and I can honestly say that since conversation was introduced into my classrooms some five years ago, there has been an ease, a charm, an affability, that was previously absent; and the intellectual atmosphere is delightfully invigorating.

And now to return to that fantastic kindergarten so awed by the presence of Addison that we must dismiss him once and for all. Our Latin conversation course is completed in eight semesters, three hours a week. In the first two years especially, solemnity is avoided and simplicity is the order of the day, and that in spite of

the fact we are dealing with university students. My argument for that is this: the student may be a young man, and he may have four years of high-school Latin behind him, and he may not; that does not matter. What does matter is that he has been a translator, and so inexperienced a translator is, so far as thinking in Latin is concerned, just in the kindergarten. And so the methods of that delightful time of life are employed with due respect for the fact that now the material is men, not babies.

The first year is devoted to inflection and the base is Schultz; the second is syntax and the base is Allen and Greenough. How I succeed in avoiding a formal treatment of syntax until second year, and yet from the very first day in first year not only talk Latin myself but even have the students answer in Latin and, after first week, even have them do written exercises in class without aids,—shroud these things in mystery, if you will; but really there is no mystery about them. How did you succeed in speaking fairly respectable English, long before you were ever acquainted with the secrets of English syntax? To many a justifiable objection to that question a synoptic paper of this type can not propose contrary opinions. Suffice it to say, however, that my system is founded upon the validity of that question.

In first and second year college we use a great deal of songs to retain in memory rules relative to inflection and syntax. Very few of the melodies are original compositions. What I did in most cases was commit what, I trust, was pardonable loot in the sanctuaries of classic composers, or else, I parodied popular songs of the day. With me, however, the song as an instrument of teaching Latin is much older than Latin conversation. For twelve years it has been a constant vehicle, and every one, regardless of how much he may be a scandal to the jay birds, must at least croak. In this respect I like to think we are all musical by nature, regardless of vocal talent. And in my own experience the opinion seems justified. Time and time again pupils with very poor voice and much poorer memory have been remarkable for the ease with which they retain things done in musical rime.

Visual aid is another feature of the program. With rare success I pestered my patient friends to save for me all pictorial magazines for which they had no further use. *Life Magazine*, for example, has been verily a life saver for me. The ease with which feats can be accomplished by pictures is just simply delightful. I have, for instance, one collection in color that did not cost me a cent; and yet with it I teach the five declensions and the rules for gender together with every exception as found in Schultz. There is another set of a thousand actions covering, of course, an equivalent number of Latin verbs.

Depending upon the stage of development, each picture represents one simple, complex, compound, or compound-complex sentence. In the beginning I made the mistake of having one picture stand for several sentences. That, of course, defeats the very purpose of visual education. And so today, no picture in my collections is either repeated under some other phase of thought, or representative of more than one item.

Relative to visual aids, permit me to mention an experience that may be helpful to others. I am glad that from the beginning I always wrote on the back of the picture, whatever sentence it might be that described the action of the scene. After five years even I have attained a certain amount of polish in my Latin thought processes. But polish can be detrimental to that simplicity which is prerequisite for success in the early stages of development. I fancy I retain a great deal of this simplicity by simply having recourse to those sentences which were written in the days when I had to thumb a dictionary constantly.

Leaving aside all question of sentence structure, allow me to use an example in choice of words to show what I mean. In selecting words I always preferred those that immediately suggested their English equivalent. This sometimes led to imperfections; but I thought and still fancy that thinking imperfectly in Latin is better than not thinking at all in that language, and that furthermore, given the time, these imperfections could be painlessly corrected in later development. And so they have. Given the situation, therefore, I still say, (emphasizing the English element), *strepitus est idem atque TUMULTus*, or *simulacrum STATUA est*, or *latrocinium RAPINA est aut CONSCRIPTIO MILITARIS*, and so on for such couplets as *cruciatu-TORMENTum*, *labes-PESTILENTia*, *fastigium-PINNACULum*, *munus-OFFICIum*, and *nervorum remissio-PARALYSIS*. Cassell's was, and still is, an invaluable aid to me in this respect. Where Cassell's failed me, however, I had recourse to New Testament Latin. In any case, let us consider one simple sentence as final example. Today, for instance, how do I think about the statement, '*nam* introduces cause'? I would immediately say '*nam* rationem infert.' But, *me Hercule*, of what practical value is such a sentence to the beginner? I, therefore, have recourse to the notes of former days, when, perhaps, simplicity was more ingenuously piquant. There I read what I later solemnly retail to the class, '*Nam causam introducit.*'

From such beginning, therefore, we aim to turn out at end of first year, a student that can think simply but exactly in terms of the inflectional character of the language, as well as of the principles of word-formation in practical application by process of definition. An arator among us is *is qui agrum aratro arat*, or an aratrum is *instrumentum quo arator agrum arat*. Rapid-fire questions and answers is a characteristic of our whole four-year program, but I should say it is employed most intensively wherever there is question of definition. Here the analysis of a definition by all the possible questions that can be asked about that definition, is such an aid to memory that it is only the fear of becoming tedious *ad nauseam* that prevents my showing here what an amount of dialogue can be gotten from the two definitions mentioned above.

We have long since ceased to fancy that the average English-speaking student of this streamlined educational age knows the first thing about parsing or diagraming. Since that implies his ignorance of the theory of language,—an ignorance that makes Latin syntax an interminable mystery,—we therefore devote the first week of second year to an English discussion of such topics as,

what is a word, a phrase, a clause; what distinguishes a coordinate from a subordinate clause; what is the distinction between a simple, complex, compound, compound-complex sentence. To cut a long and sad story short, when no genius crowns himself with cabbage leaves by saying, "The parts of speech are: noun, pronoun, verb, words, phrases, exclamation points, and participles," I conceal my emotion as best I can, utter a fervent *mirabile dictu* and plunge into syntax, after I have converted the terminology into Latin and spent another profitable week on the same subject in Latin dialogue. My main guide here is Alcuin, 'Saxo, Franco, Discipuli; Magister, Dialogus' (Migne, 101, ii, 268).

By third year we are equipped to take up the Latin authors neglected in first and second year. We read them in a year, discussing them in Latin, of course, and retaining the dialogue form throughout. The same method is pursued in fourth year, relative to the authors of the last two years of college. Composition, you will notice, is conspicuous by its absence, unless you realize that the student has been taking notes in Latin from the first day he came to class, and that he improves himself as he goes on.

I would say that the purpose behind these last two years is twofold. First the vocabulary, which up until now has been primarily grammatical, must be broadened into more practical fields of classic thought. Second, our infantine style must put on the clothing of a man. To this end we keep on improving what we know, guided by the teacher who, I trust, keeps them in the grove of the epistle of Cicero and Pliny.

The classics were never written to suit my method or anybody else's method. And no student, therefore, is expected to think in terms of every construction. I can't do that myself. For instance, Tacitus is one of our readings. A plague, say I, on the *infinitivus historicus*, and another on many a tight-fitting *ablativus absolutus* where Cicero would have cleared up the whole situation with a broad sweeping clause.

Do all my students become competent thinkers in Latin? Most assuredly not. Take, for example, the genius, who asked me from the running board of his roadster, "What good does it do to learn how to think in Latin? That can't help you run your car." Well, you see how it is quite possible to be able to run a car, and yet think in no language. Pardon my pride, however, when I say, that I have yet to meet a student, even the Barney Oldfield type, who did not prefer the direct to the indirect method. One and all seem to couch their complaint in a sort of regret that they were not initiated into the direct method, somewhere about first-year high. I am not so sure the complaint is not justified.

Some time ago I was demonstrating pictorial Latin at a high-school Academy. I expected, of course, students from one year, preferably fourth. Imagine my grief upon entering an auditorium containing some two hundred youngsters gathered from every year in the school. There was present also an excellent teacher, fond devotee of Cicero, inveterate opponent of Latin conversation. Thoughts of Daniel in the lion's den affording no consolation, I saw that it was a question of do or die. Aiming

to produce at least one result, therefore, I plunged in and centered my attention primarily upon one pupil in second year. To every ten Latin questions to the class in general, I purposed to have the object lesson answer about four. But alas! Moira wasn't smiling. The child lacked quickness, and she was, besides, very shy. We all take a pardonable pride in our methods. It is so easy to convince ourselves that pupils go for us, as children cry for Castoria. Discountenance, then, what you must in what I here describe as the ultimate result. After an hour of questioning, I was ready for a speedy exit. The children, however, asked me to stay on. A delightful request to accede to at first; but I assure you that, as I grew weary, it was only their own volition in the matter that converted a one-hour class into four.

As regards the center of attack, the child got on so well eventually that the fond devotee of Cicero, who had eyed my entrance in such a manner that I felt I had something to do with the Catiline Conspiracy,—well she changed her look to one of pity, as much as to say, 'Just another stupid follower of the Gracchi.'

We never truly know even a word or form, much less a linguistic rule, until we have used them. "By playing on the lyre we become lyre-players," says Aristotle.

Every acquisition in the shape of words must be turned to use, from the very beginning, for the making of Latin. Oral composition, and composition by the help of the blackboard, must be a part of every lesson from the first.—S. S. Laurie

Our subscribers will be interested in knowing that a *Guide for Readings in English on Roman Civilization*, by Professor Oscar Edward Nybakken, has been published by the American Classical League Service Bureau. This neatly printed 50-page pamphlet is "intended to assist teachers, students, and general readers in the fields of Latin language, literature, history, and civilization to carry out a systematic study of Roman life in its several aspects and to coordinate these phases in attaining an intelligent understanding of the past and present significance of ancient Rome's political, social, and cultural life." It should be noted that "references are made to readings in the English language only," and that "the books selected are ones which school, college, and public libraries are most likely to possess." Price 35 cents.

Octogenarians

"Gorgias lived to be one hundred and eight. Then he went on a hunger strike, and—died. When he was asked how he had contrived to live so long and keep so sound in all his faculties, he replied that he had never accepted anybody's invitation—to dinner." (Lucian *Octogenarians*, 23)

"Philemon, the comic poet, when ninety-seven, was lying on a couch one day, taking a rest. Seeing a donkey eat the figs that had been prepared for him, he burst into a fit of laughter. He called his servant and told him, amid a great and hearty laugh, to give the donkey a cup of unmixed wine. And so, choked with his laughter, he—died." (Lucian *Octogenarians*, 25)

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Editorial

While we are plodding our weary way along the humbler path, not to say, the old rugged road, of initiating young minds in the ancient mysteries, it is extremely refreshing to find that, at the same time, in these same United States, giant strides are being made by some teachers and students to penetrate, by leaps and bounds, to the very heart of the classical spirit. It is in this sense that we cordially welcome an occasional staging of classical plays in Greek or Latin in our colleges. Sophocles's *Oedipus Coloneus* is to be presented on May 17 and 18 at Holy Cross—a full report of which will be given to our readers at a later date.

Meanwhile we were agreeably surprised by the news that a trilogy of classical dramas was rendered by the Greek, Classical, and French Academies at Fordham University, April 21st, to a large and enthusiastic audience. The Greek Academy's contribution to that classical Sunday evening was the *Clouds* of Aristophanes. Under the auspices of the College Classical Academy the Freshmen enacted Plautus's *Pot of Gold*. The third of the foreign language plays was the second act of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. The plays were under the general supervision of Mr. W. F. Lynch, S. J., instructor in Classics and English in the College.

While we cannot, of course, dispense with the more tedious and circuitous route leading to the spirit of the classics, we should, no doubt, occasionally try this more enjoyable short cut of theatrical presentation. Our readers will remember, in this connection, Mr. Reinert's paper on the Jesuit Theatre Movement, published in the March number of this BULLETIN. Will the Middle West and the Pacific Coast take a hint from the progressive East? *Ex oriente lux!*

Matthew Arnold was a staunch upholder of the classical tradition in secondary schools. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century the choice of studies was made

a particularly 'live issue' by men like Huxley and Spencer who eagerly seized upon the immense scientific activity of the century as a weapon in their assault upon the humanistic ideal. "It was of course to be expected that as soon as a large body of new scientific knowledge was available its discoverers and popularizers would demand a place for it in the curricula of schools and colleges." The real mischief lay deeper. "They demanded for modern science not merely a place but the predominant place in a reformed educational program. Pointing to the rich fruits of recent scientific effort, they challenged the 'classicists' to exhibit an equivalent." Frankly, it was their aim 'to destroy the humanists.'

Whatever we may think of Arnold's theory of literature or of his philosophy of life, we cannot help admiring him for his eternal insistence on fundamental principles. It was this ability of his to give an abiding value even to ephemeral issues that made him a redoubtable champion in fighting the 'scientists' who were loud in pushing their preposterous claims. Fine natural endowment and sound early training made him a perfect match for his opponents; and today it affords one exquisite pleasure to see how gallantly he drew his rapier in behalf of the humanists. His *Literature and Science*¹ makes refreshing reading today when 'refreshment' is sorely needed by the friends of the classics. The battle, vigorously begun in Arnold's time, rages more fiercely today, for the ranks of the natural sciences have since been strengthened by the batteries of the 'social sciences.'

No real humanist would wish to exclude the sciences from his educational program. The greatest humanists of antiquity, the Greeks, were pioneers in scientific investigation. But to admit the sciences into our schools and colleges to the dwarfing, if not stifling, of the humanistic subjects—that is another matter. Matthew Arnold can teach us how to edge our sword.

¹ See the fine résumé of Arnold's views of education in Stuart P. Sherman's *Matthew Arnold: How to Know Him* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill).

"An intelligent man," says Plato, "will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and will less value the others." I cannot consider that a bad description of the aim of education, and of the motives which should govern us, whether we are preparing for a hereditary seat in the English House of Lords or for the pork trade in Chicago.
—Matthew Arnold

I read five pages of Greek anthology every day, looking out all the words I do not know; this is what I shall always understand by *education*, and it does me good, and gives me great pleasure.—Matthew Arnold

Plato cast some ugly shadows, but he brought an illumination like the rising sun.—B. Farrington

New York, with its geometrical lay-out and its numbered streets and avenues, is a thoroughly Pythagorean town.—B. Farrington

Fac Hoc : Abundantius Vives

BY FRANCIS A. SULLIVAN, S. J.
St. Andrew-on-Hudson

In stressing the broad, humanistic approach to the classics, one may well give the impression that the great authors of Greece and Rome alone and perfectly represent to us today the ideally complete type of human excellence to which nothing can be added.¹ That, of course, is short of the whole truth. Not Athens and Rome alone are our old homelands, but Palestine as well; we are not merely humanists, but Christian humanists; conscious as we all are of our great debt to Greece and Rome, we realize that we owe an immeasurably greater debt to Christianity. The Christian humanist knows well that "there emanates from the monuments of Greek and Roman literature an emotion and spiritual elevation, educative in the highest sense"; as he contemplates the works of ancient art, he experiences the rapture felt by Plutarch in the presence of the works of Pericles: "There is a sort of bloom of newness upon these works, preserving them from the touch of time, as if they had some perennial spirit and undying vitality in them." But he is keenly aware, too, of another great miracle in the history of human civilization: *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis . . . plenum gratiae et veritatis . . . et de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus*.

This is an important point stressed by Sir Richard W. Livingstone in his *Greek Ideals and Modern Life* (chap. vi). "Christianity," he says in conclusion, "is neither a cancellation of nor a declension from Hellenism, but a development and completion of it; it enlarged the Greek conception of man, defined more fully the idea of God, and emphasized more justly the place of religion in life . . . Augustine, starting from the *Hortensius* of Cicero and the *Libri Platonici*, went on from Plato to Christ, finding in Greek a road that took him far on his journey, yet left him short of a permanent habitation for the human spirit." This same idea is strikingly brought out in the beautiful synthesis of humanism elaborated by Charmot, *L'Humanisme et l'Humain*, and, more recently still, in the book of L. Meylan, *Les Humanités et la Personne* (Paris, 1939). This inspiring book should be read by every teacher of the humanities.

Meylan starts with the fundamental idea that the humanities mean, not merely the Greek and Roman classics, but the *ensemble* of all the formative influences (home, school, church, etc.) operating on the young mind; a humane education is one that initiates the *petit d'homme* into the realization of his own *humanitas*, those human qualities and powers virtually within himself. The programme of such a humane education is deep and wide, involving a twofold process: a contact with the most authentic and diverse manifestations of man's *humanitas* in the history of human civilization, and the exercise of all those powers which properly make a man. Thus the young student is constantly stimulated to actualize his own virtual human powers and become a harmoniously developed man. Meylan stresses the need of a unified aim to guide one, like an Ariadne-thread, through the labyrinth of courses; he insists on the need of incessant work, *labor improbus*, in teacher and pupil, for *ut agri, sic animi cultura*; he has some eloquent chap-

ters on the teacher of the humanities through whom vital contact is made with the great spirits of the past; *omne vivum ex vivo*: only fire awakens responsive fire; virtue goes out from the men of yesterday through the men of today, the teachers.

Finally, he describes the role of religion in a humane education. *Nolens, volens* the school of humanism is a school of God, since the humanity incarnate in men is but a revelation of God to and in the world. It is impossible to present a faithful and integral image of man by abstracting from the Great Reality in the world of nature and man—just as though one were to show Raphael's *Transfiguration* or Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, and leave out Him Who gives meaning to the whole scene. He concludes his book with these words: "De telle sorte que ce n'est que dans une *atmosphère religieuse* que nous pouvons espérer voir fleurir les humanités poétiques dont nous avons esquissé, dans cet ouvrage, le propos et l'opération, les humanités qui aideront enfin le petit d'homme à devenir un homme."

This is an excellent book. It opens up wide perspectives to the teacher of the humanities, enlarging his vision and kindling his enthusiasm for a task well worthy of devoted service—that of moulding men. "Wherefore, my dear Simmias," says Socrates in the *Phaedo*, "a man should bend all his efforts in this life to achieve wisdom and virtue; for the prize is fair and the hope great . . . it is a glorious venture, and we ought to repeat such words over and over again to ourselves, which is why I have spun the tale out to such length."

¹ [See the author's paper, entitled "Fac Hoc et Vives," in CLASSICAL BULLETIN, March, 1940. Ed. Note]

Two noteworthy papers and one excellent book should be pressed upon the attention of our readers: William C. Bagley, "The Significance of the Essentialist Movement in Educational Theory," in *The Classical Journal* for March, 1939. Section V is of special interest to classical teachers. The ancient languages "represent the kind of learning that requires concentrated and sustained effort. Skilful teaching can do much to enliven this process, but even the best teaching cannot be a substitute for the learner's determined and dogged effort." Professor Bagley is a member of the staff of Teachers College, Columbia University.

W. H. Alexander, "The Classical Discipline in Education, 1899-1939." *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*; Third Series, Section II, Vol. XXXIII, 1939. The title of this essay tells its own story. Professor Alexander, formerly of Alberta University, is now in the Department of Classics at the University of California.

S. S. Laurie, *Language and Linguistic Method* (James Thin: Edinburgh, 1893). Professor Laurie presents eleven very practical lectures on the thesis: Language is the supreme instrument of education. Two important lectures are devoted to Latin.

The essential aim of art is to raise man above common life and to waken in him a sense of his celestial origin.
—Matthew Arnold

Homer—Chief Humanist

By RAYMOND V. SCHODER, S. J.
West Baden College

ἄλις πάντεσσιν Ὅμηρος
(Theocritus, 16.20)

In that delightful little dialogue the *Ion*, Plato records a spontaneous way of reacting to Homer which is the experience not only of the enthusiastic rhapsode who confesses it, but also, in varying degrees, of all who have ever gained an intimate knowledge of that earliest and greatest of poets. For *Ion* confesses to Socrates that whenever there is talk of any of the other poets he cannot hold his mind on the topic, nor add anything of worth to the conversation, but shamefully falls off to dozing; whereas whenever anyone mentions Homer he awakes on the instant and is all attention and full of good ideas (532b-e).

The explanation of this appeal lies in Homer's supreme humanism. He has a profound understanding of human nature and a remarkable gift for vividly portraying it. In Homer's poems we come to understand and appreciate Nature and the human heart with a clarity and depth we never had before; the great outlines and small details, the essential notes and the varying personal traits of our common nature are lucidly refulgent in his verse; to see life through his eyes is to see in it a new richness and beauty. It is precisely for this, that he is so full of human nature, and gives so clear and vitalizing a representation of it, that he is of lasting value to us. Because he brings us into such intimate contact with the joys and sorrows, the heights and depths of the universal heart of man, it is impossible that we should not better understand and appreciate our fellows and ourselves.

Now, this humanistic culture is what we primarily seek from a classical education. I wish to show that the best source from which to draw it is the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Of course, other authors, too, must be allowed to enrich our minds with their thought. But I believe that the best, most certain way to arouse and develop in the student a completely human outlook on life is, in the realm of literature (apart from the Sacred Scriptures), the reading and study of Homer. For no author in human literature—not even Plato, or Sophocles, or Vergil, or Dante, or Shakespeare—is a fountainhead of true humanism so accessible and so inexhaustible as Homer. Let us prove these two points separately.

In saying that the noble waters of humanistic culture which flow in silvery streams through Homer's lines are easily accessible, I mean that there is scarcely anything else in his poetry to conceal them or render them turbid. The unique simplicity and straightforwardness of his expression allow his deep-running reflections of the moods and circumstances of human life to stand forth in clear detail, for they are only softened and enhanced by their passage through the subtle, vibrant medium of his language. There is in him none of the intricacy of structure or compressed, elliptic diction that stands guard, Cerberuslike, over the treasures of Sophoclean wisdom; none of the learned allusions and literary devices that so often make Vergil's soulful thought an object of long study before becoming an object of delight; none of the elaborate background of history,

theology, science, and personal experience against which Dante throws, from one abyss to the other, his awesome, crowded reflection of the universe.

For in Homer, human nature stands forth in unobscured simplicity. The vision here is direct, instantaneous. An Homeric hero speaks, and we know at once the essence of his character (*Il.* 12. 243):

εἰς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος, ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης.

We look on spellbound, and are moved to the verge of tears, when Hector for the last time takes into his arms his infant son,

ἀταλάφρονα, νήπιον αὐτῶς,
Ἐκτορίδην ἀγαπητόν, ἀλγικίον ἀστέρι καλῶ,

and bids his last farewell to beautiful young Andromache, as she clasps the child to her apprehensive breast and smiles through her tears (*Il.* 6.394-496). The very essence of lovable, garrulous old age is to be seen in any speech of Nestor's; and in the quiet, graceful movements and exquisite dignity in speech of Nausicaa there is mirrored in limpid beauty all the charm and nobility of youth.

In the sphere of natural beauty, too, there is an unsurpassed vividness and immediacy of impression to be had from Homer's lines. No reader's mind can fail to gain new breadth of view and new richness of imagination from such intimate contact with things as Homer establishes, when in sonorous verse he gives us a swift, vigorous portrayal of some scene from Nature. Read his pulsing, onomatopoeic description of a huge wave of the loud-booming sea as it crashes with terrifying force against an unyielding crag (*Il.* 4.422-426):

πόντῳ μὲν τε πρῶτα κορύσσεται, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
χέροσφ' ὀρηγνύμενον μέγ' ἀλά βρέμει, ἀμφὶ δέ τ' ἄκρας
κυρτόν ἰὸν κορυφοῦται, ἀποπτύει δ' ἄλδος ἔχνην.

Most of us will confess that never before did we realize in all its fulness the graceful beauty of a ship until we saw that of Odysseus making her way home from holy Thebes in the soft glow of rosy-fingered dawn, a black form upon the silvery sea, white sails bellied out in the breeze and a long purple wake spreading out from her loud-gurgling prow as she flies along ploughing the deep.¹ It is almost as moving as an actual vision of the scene merely to read aloud his description of the barrier that protects fertile Phthia, nourisher of heroes, from the horsemen of Troy (*Il.* 1.156-7):

ἐπεὶ ἡ μάλα πολλὰ μεταξὺ
οὐρεά τε σκιδόντα θάλασσά τε ἤχησσαν.

The minimum of words, the maximum of expressiveness. All the elements that can impress and grip and mellow the hearer's mind are there in stark, wondrously melodious simplicity. Those aspects of reality and of life which by their very nature induce in the human soul a greater richness and fineness of quality stand forth in Homer's lines unobscured and irresistible.

Even a few such passages would make the reading of Homer a mighty educational force. But the almost inexhaustible abundance of them throughout the two lengthy poems constitutes Homer a source of cultural humanism without superior in the world's literature. This is, however, not so much a matter of successive passages, as of the whole spirit and mentality of the

poems. There are, indeed, as many great scenes that tower above the whole as there are peaks on many-ridged Olympus. But even these do not explain the depth of impression made on the receptive reader of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. For to their influence is added the less striking, but continual, cumulative effect of innumerable revelations of the poet's outlook on life. In short, there is a special quality or *form* to Homer's mind, which is the rich fruit of extraordinary genius nourished on long observation and deep pondering over the nature and circumstances of man's life, and mellowed by the gentle, penetrating rays of a kindly, all-embracing humanity of outlook. Whatever thought or object enters his mind is transmuted, enriched, infused with something of that mind's own qualities.² From the depths of its associations and the texture of its make-up, there arise elements to adorn, illumine, and flavor the resulting concept so that it becomes a revelation and an education for our less gifted minds. Let a man take Homer for guide and commentator as the great pageant of unchanging human life passes before his eyes in the majestic, living portrayal of his verse, and behold! he finds a similar depth and richness of understanding being induced (by sympathetic vibrations, as it were, of the psychic order) in his own mind. He goes away an awakened, a more cultured, more fully human man.

Consider some instances, from a myriad host, of Homer's unique, utterly human reaction to life and things.

Who does not feel that he has looked into the very depths of the human heart when Homer describes (*Il.* 6.392-500) the inexpressible pathos and tenderness of Hector's last farewell to his young bride and dearly-loved infant son? The sight of old Priam, majestic, hoary-headed, broken with grief, as he touches to his lips, with a courage amazing even to Achilles, the dread hands of the warrior who had slain so many of his sons, and pleads in the name of Achilles' own aged sire for the corpse of Hector (*Il.* 24.471-676), cannot but move the reader profoundly. When we hear Priam and Hecuba pleading piteously with Hector to save himself from Achilles (*Il.* 22.36-91), or Andromache and Hecuba and Helen pouring forth their bottomless grief in tears and prayers over his corpse (*Il.* 24.723-776), we feel that the very essence of human sorrow has been captured in the poet's words.

Again and again this greatest poet of human nature (next to the inspired author of *Job*) lays bare with flawless ease the deepest motions of the human heart. He can perfectly convey the sorrow of a woman who clings with pitiful sobs about the gasping body of her fatally wounded husband, till she is beaten off by the foe and carried into slavery, there to waste away her cheeks in grievous woe (*Od.* 8.523-530). We see Antilochus struck speechless with grief over the death of Patroclus, as his eyes fill with tears and his voice chokes (*Il.* 17.694-696). We are made to share the emotions of old Laertes when he faints on recognizing his long-lost son Odysseus (*Od.* 24.345-355); we participate in the boundless joy of Penelope when she recognizes Odysseus and embraces him in an ecstasy of happiness (*Od.* 23.205-246). Our

heart warms at the tender, perfect little picture the poet draws (*Il.* 16.7-11) of a tiny girl,

νηπίη, ἥ θ' ἄμα μητρὶ θέουσ' ἀνελέσθαι ἀνώγει,
εἰανοῦ ἀπτομένη, καὶ τ' ἐσσυμένην κατερύκει,
δακρυόεσσα δέ μιν ποτιδέρκεται, ὄφρ' ἀνέλῃται.

This is the greatest single element of Homeric poetry for the transmission of a humanistic culture—the grand array of perfectly portrayed characters who are made to *live* before us. Hector, Achilles, Agamemnon, Odysseus, Menelaus, Nestor, Priam, the lovable old Eumaeus, fiery Diomedes, Laertes, Penelope, Nausicaa, Helen, Andromache, Hecuba, Arete, the disagreeable Melantho and Antinous—how vivid, intriguing, diverse are these men and women that walk from Homer's song right into our lives and hearts, that cannot be forgotten!

Then, too, we are brought in contact with all those other qualities of Homer's mind: his charming simplicity and naïvete, his utter unsophistication, his love of Nature, his noble outlook on life, his deep, spontaneous acknowledgment of man's complete dependence on the gods. We hear him tell us how man is the frailest, most pathetic of all things that creep on the earth, his unstable will fluctuating from good to evil according as the Father of gods and men leads him from day to day (*Od.* 18.130-136); how his generations are like those of the leaves—*ἡ μὲν φύει, ἡ δ' ἀπολήγει* (*Il.* 6.146-149); how the moral of life is reducible to a single fact (*Od.* 22.374):

ὥς κακοεργίης εὐεργεσίῃ μέγ' ἀμείνων.

Add to all this the purely poetic merits of Homer, the brilliance of his imagery and incomparable similes, the depth of his emotional reactions, the sheer poetry of such passages as the description of the wonderful armor Hephaestus made for Achilles (*Il.* 18.478-608), and the magnificent merits of many passages from the viewpoint of drama or oratory alone, and one has done Homer the injustice of trying to itemize in a mere shred of prose the superabundant riches of his poetry.

In Homer, then, I believe, we have the best medium for transmitting to the student that fully human mentality which is the aim of a classical education. For in his two poems the tonic, enlivening waters of a noble humanism flow not only distilled and crystal-clear but in abundance. Here is the quintessence of that spirit and mentality which we strive to impart, which we believe should be the goal and abiding fruit of a liberal education. To Homer's gift we must bring, of course, that Christian concept of life which alone can complete and stabilize it. We should add the legacies of the other great humanizing forces—art, music, history, other literature, the sacred Liturgy. But Homer's gift will remain supreme of its kind.

Let me summarize my contention in the expressive words of Plato (*Ion* 530b-c): τὸ . . . ἐν τε ἄλλοις ποιηταῖς διατρίβειν πολλοῖς καὶ ἀγαθοῖς, καὶ δὴ καὶ μάλιστα ἐν Ὀμήρῳ, τῷ ἀρίστῳ καὶ θειοτάτῳ τῶν ποιητῶν, καὶ τὴν τοῦτου διάνοιαν ἐκμανθάνειν, μὴ μόνον τὰ ἔπη, ζηλωτόν ἐστιν.

¹ *Il.* 1.477-483, with the other details supplied in earlier passages.

² Cp. the Scholastic adage: *Quidquid recipitur, recipitur ad modum recipientis.*

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* P = Poem; R = Review; E = Editorial.

Intercollegiate Latin Contest, 1939-1940

Held on April 4, 1940, between all the Jesuit colleges of the Middle West with the following awards:

1. David Chopin, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.
 2. Edward F. Flaherty, Rockhurst, Kansas City, Mo.
 3. John N. Felten, Loyola University, Chicago, Ill.
 3. James L. Slattery, Loyola University, Chicago, Ill.
 3. William L. Molo, Rockhurst, Kansas City, Mo.
 6. Walter Pollman, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.
 7. Edward A. Foy, Xavier University, Cincinnati, O.
 8. John A. Hanley, University of Detroit, Detroit, Mich.
 9. Clarence M. Wagener, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wis.
 10. Emmet J. Donnelly, University of Detroit, Detroit, Mich.
- Total points: Rockhurst 16; St. Louis 15; Loyola 14; Xavier 4; Detroit 4; Marquette 2.

